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SUBJECT: POLAND - THE STRUGGLE FOR SOLIDARITY

REF: WARSAW 397

Classified By: Political Counselor Dan Sainz for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. June 4 celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of free elections were supposed to highlight Poland's prominent role in toppling communism in Europe in 1989. Instead, plans for a media extravaganza in Gdansk have devolved into competing events in multiple cities amid mutual charges of politicizing Solidarity's historical legacy. The controversy reflects the persisting rivalries between the Tusk Government and Solidarity, between the two center-right post-Solidarity political parties -- Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) -- and among past and present Solidarity members. At the heart of the rivalries are competing claims as to who are the true heirs of Solidarity -- and who are its betrayers. Like a family torn asunder, the Solidarity generation has given way to enemy camps engaged in endless recriminations. The nasty political climate has tarnished commemorations that all Poles and Europeans should be celebrating, and may be contributing to widespread Polish voter apathy. END SUMMARY.

"FREEDOM: MADE IN POLAND"

¶12. (SBU) In a February 13 Sejm address, FM Sikorski announced plans for a media campaign highlighting Poland's leading role in toppling communism in 1989. The campaign's slogan, "Freedom: Made in Poland," was intended to remind Europeans that the fall of the Berlin Wall would not have been possible without the leadership of Poland's Solidarity movement. The campaign of parades and festivals was to culminate in a June 4 ceremony -- with participation of leaders of former Warsaw Pact countries -- followed by a concert in front of the Gdansk shipyards marking the 20th anniversary of the 1989 elections, which produced Poland's first post-Communist government. Despite later budget cuts, some events went forward as planned. However, Polish media took note when an EU Commission-prepared short documentary on the fall of communism gave short shrift to events in Poland. Media continue to make comparisons with German plans to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall in October, predicting that Poland's contributions will be long-forgotten by then.

NO SOLIDARITY IN GOVERNMENT-LABOR DISPUTE

¶13. (C) Plans for the June 4 event began to unravel after Warsaw police used pepper gas to disrupt a Solidarity trade union demonstration outside the April 29-30 congress of the European People's Party (EPP), with which Poland's ruling coalition is aligned. The EPP congress was headlined by Tusk and former President Lech Walesa, and attended by a number of center-right European prime ministers. Complaining about police use of "excessive force," Solidarity threatened to disrupt the June 4 Gdansk event if PM Tusk did not meet to discuss their grievances about the Government's anti-economic

crisis package (ref A) and the GOP's failure to "defend" shipyards in Gdansk, Gdynia, and Szczecin against EU restrictions on public financing. GOP officials decided to relocate the festivities to Krakow's Wawel Castle, where demonstrations are prohibited. Tusk later invited Gdansk shipyard unions, including Solidarity, to take part in a televised debate, which the larger unions boycotted. Union officials announced they would hold their own June 4 rally at the Gdansk shipyards.

SOLIDARITY ITSELF DIVIDED

¶4. (C) Solidarity national leaders dismissed PO accusations that the union is working with Poland's other post-Solidarity party -- PiS -- to "politicize" the June 4 anniversary celebrations. The union's leaders deny any political party affiliation, but acknowledge that most of its rank-and-file sympathize with PiS views. In a May 19 letter to Solidarity National Committee Chair Janusz Sniadek, prominent Solidarity-affiliated employees of the Gdynia shipyards explained that they would not attend Solidarity's June 4 events in Gdansk because Solidarity leaders were too closely linked to PiS. The Solidarity movement of the 1980s was greater than just the shipyard workers, the letter continued; it included port and railway workers, miners, farmers, academics, and public servants. The letter also blasts PiS's prolonged war against the "Uklad" (the supposed network of former communist collaborators), accusing PiS chair Jaroslaw Kaczynski of labeling his inner circle 'Solidarity' and all other opposition members 'secret police'.

SOLIDARITY MANTLE AT STAKE

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¶5. (C) The Tusk Government's ongoing feud with Solidarity goes beyond a pro-business government's tensions with organized labor. It is an extension of the PO-PiS battle since 2001, when the two parties emerged from the ashes of the Solidarity political party. More broadly, the battle is also part of an ongoing "historical debate" about former President Lech Walesa's role in the Solidarity movement and the recurring, largely baseless allegations propagated by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) -- controlled by appointees of the 2005-2007 PiS Government -- that he collaborated with Communist-era security services. IPN President Janusz Kurtyka told PolCouns that Walesa was fair game, because he was using his legacy for political purposes. Ironically, the IPN attacks have actually bolstered Walesa's popularity among Poles.

SOLIDARITY WITHOUT WALESIA?

¶6. (C) Like PiS, Solidarity trade union leaders have increasingly distanced themselves from Walesa. In recent years, Walesa has misrepresented the Solidarity struggle, according to Solidarity National Committee deputy chair Jerzy Langer. Langer told Poloff that Solidarity was first and foremost an organization of workers fighting for the right to organize a union. Poland's struggle for freedom was greater than Walesa and Solidarity. He accused Walesa of using the Solidarity mantle for his own political purposes -- a key reason the Solidarity trade union has resisted political entanglements. Public confusion created by Walesa's recent appearances at Libertas campaign rallies in Rome and Madrid has made it easier for Solidarity to disassociate itself. Langer said Walesa is "out of touch with reality." For his part, Walesa has publicly criticized Solidarity's "anti-Government" activities, particularly its boycott of the debate with PM Tusk. Walesa has suggested the union should no longer be allowed to call itself "Solidarity" or use the Solidarity movement's logo.

COMMENT: POLITICAL APATHY ON THE RISE

¶7. (C) While Poland has successfully pressed other EU member

states to act in "solidarity" on issues such as energy security and relations with Russia, the lack of solidarity -- or even civility -- in Polish domestic politics is often cited as a factor in widespread political apathy. According to a recent study, Poles are among the most apathetic voters in Europe. This apathy extends to historical memory surrounding the 1989 fall of communism. In an internet survey, only 36 percent of respondents agreed that the 20th anniversary of June 4 elections was an important event for Poland. A number of media commentaries have lamented both the apathy and the increasing irrelevance of the 1989 elections to Polish society, although they describe declining interest in politics, along with increasing consumerism, as natural side-effects of Poland's democratic transformation.

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